

Overcoming Myself

By Shirley M. Haws

If a person has a problem it is much better to face it from the start, because if he doesn't, someday he will come up against it and there will be no turning back. Almost everyone has one of these problems in his life that he has run away from, only to find that wherever he goes it follows him.

My problem is silly and emotional. It's not earth shaking, in fact the few people who know about it think it's quite funny. It's completely out of character, not at all like me, but it has caused me embarrassment and concern from the time I started school.

I remember the first day I noticed I had this problem. I was in the first grade. Miss Thurman, our teacher, placed some blocks and a frame in front of each of us and told that that when she said go, we were to place the blocks to fit in the frame as fast as we could. This was going to be a test. Everything was fine until she mentioned the word test. My pulse quickened, I became breathless, my mouth became dry, and my mind went completely blank. Needless to say, I failed that first test miserably.

From that time on, whenever I've had a test, I went through my school life with this problem. It was always there, but I just turned my back on it and never did a thing to alleviate the situation. There were times, when I was particularly apprehensive over a test that I stayed at home pretending to be ill. This worked out well because when I went back the next day the teacher would keep me in at noon and give it to me orally. This way I could answer the questions fine.

Throughout high school, I barely managed to get a passing grade by doing the other assignments well enough to make up for the tests I failed. When I graduated and was married, I was certain this problem would never bother me again.

It didn't for several years, but when it did, it was in the worst possible circumstance. I had been Stake M.I.A. President for a year, and had a good knowledge of the program. It was the Saturday of quarterly conference. A representative of the Young Men's and Young Women's M.I.A. General Board, along with Hendry D. Taylor were conducting a meeting for the executives of Lehi Stake.

In the process of Sister Baird's (the general board member) talk, she asked if I would come up and help her. I walked to the pulpit and things were fine until she handed me a pencil and paper with questions on it and asked me to hurriedly answer a little test so she could use it in the rest of her talk. I froze. My mind was a complete blank, and simple answers that I knew as well as my name were completely gone from my mind. I have never been so humiliated in my entire life. Sister Baird did a wonderful job of covering up for me, but then and there I made a resolve never again to turn my back on a problem. The time to conquer then is when they're small, and they don't matter so much. From that day on, I started facing and working to overcome my fear of tests. This is one of the reasons I started college.

The tests at college have been far from easy for me; the first one I took was very hectic. A room full of warm friendly people turned into cold calculating vultures just waiting to pounce when I made a mistake. A kind thoughtful teacher became a Dracula whose only aim in life was to see that I failed miserably. I wanted to run out of the room and back to my home where I was safe from such a terrible ordeal, but I stayed and took the test. That night I was very proud. Not about the score I received, but that I had finally faced my problem. I knew the worst part was over.

Each time I take a test now, I feel the apprehension ease a little and I have a renewed hope that someday I will overcome this problem. I know it will take a long time and I'm prepared for it, but I know also that if I am determined enough, I will succeed and the day will come when I will no more lose control of my mind at the mention of the word test.